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LABOR NEWS FROM THE 42ND

KORETZ CONVENES HEARING ON PLIGHT OF PORT TRUCK DRIVERS

On January 7, 2005, the Assembly Committee on Labor and Employment, in conjunction with the Senate Committee on Labor and Industrial Relations, conducted a hearing to examine the working conditions facing truck drivers at California ports. The hearing was conducted in Wilmington and was presided over by Assemblymember Paul Koretz (D-West Hollywood) and Senator Richard Alarcón (D-Sun Valley), chairs of the respective committees.

Also attending the hearing were: Assemblymember Betty Karnette (D-Long Beach), Assemblymember Jenny Oropeza (D-Long Beach), Senator Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach), and Senator Gloria Romero (D-Los Angeles).

Approximately 11,000 short-haul truck drivers are employed in the Los Angeles area. The majority of these workers are new immigrants and 87 percent of them are "owner-operators." As owner-operators, these drivers are largely responsible for the costs of fuel, insurance, maintenance, taxes and other fees. The drivers are paid "by the load" and must go through the trucking company dispatcher to receive any loads.

Several independent truckers who work at the ports of Long Beach, Los Angeles and Oakland testified about the low wages and difficult working conditions they face. Abelon Zerfiel, a driver from Oakland, testified that on average he works 11 to 13 hours per day, with as much as six hours of that time spent waiting in

GOVERNOR PROPOSES TO ELIMINATE IMPORTANT WORKER PROTECTION BOARDS

As part of the [California Performance Review](#), the Governor recently submitted his [Governor's Reorganization Plan # 1](#) to eliminate 88 separate boards and commissions.

Among the entities slated for elimination under the Governor's proposal are three boards that protect worker rights: the Cal/OSHA Appeals Board, the California Workers' Compensation Appeals Board, and the California Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board. Under the Governor's proposal, the roles of these three separate entities would be merged into a "superboard" called the Employment and Benefits Appeals Board (EBAB). EBAB will consist of nine Governor-appointed members who will serve at the pleasure of the Governor—meaning they can be fired at any time for any reason.

This proposal constitutes yet another attempt at a power-grab by the Governor and would greatly endanger the independence of these boards. One individual—the Governor—would have sole authority over worker rights to judicial review if an employee is laid off, injured on the job, or has a safety problem at work. In addition, the proposal makes all members of the "superboard" vulnerable to immediate dismissal if they make a decision that the Governor dislikes.

line at the port terminals. For that work, Zerfiel said he brings home \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year with no benefits.

Chuck Mack, Director of the Port Division for the International Brotherhood of

Teamsters urged the Legislature to act promptly to pressure the industry to improve the working conditions of drivers. "They have had plenty of time, the problems have been apparent for the past decade, the industry press has been highlighting them in cover stories year after year," said Mack.

John McLaurin, president of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association (PMSA), was grilled by the committee about the industry's response to the working conditions. Committee members expressed particular dismay that, although PMSA acknowledged there is "concern" in the industry, they did not have specific policy recommendations to improve working conditions.

